

THE SERPENT IN EDEN

By George Munson.

"Isn't she dreadful, John!" whispered Joyce, casting a glance sideways toward the old woman next door.

The old woman was watering her rose trees. She was a horrible old woman, in outward aspect, at any rate. She might have been anywhere between eighty and a hundred years



"You Know Who That Is, My Dear?"

of age; she was crooked and shrunk-en, and her wizened features were exactly like those popularly attributed to a witch. And yet she was watering her rose trees with as loving care as a young girl might have bestowed upon them.

"Poor old lady!" said John Durham. "To think that people can live to be as old as that."

"Do you think she was ever a young and beautiful girl, dearest?"

asked Joyce contentedly, nestling down into the fold of her lover's arm.

"I guess she was young all right, but I am sure she never was beautiful," said John.

Joyce Lamont and John Durham had been engaged for three months and their wedding was to take place that fall. John Durham was a newcomer to Catesville, where he had opened a law office and was already securing a fair measure of business, which gave promise of a comfortable livelihood. As for Joyce—well, if you have ever spent even a week in Catesville you will certainly have heard of the Lamonts. Daniel Lamont was one of the first American statesmen in the time of President Buchanan. The death of Joyce's mother, a few months before, had left Joyce alone in the old house, to which she had just returned after several years of absence at school and abroad, and everybody was glad that she was to be married, now that she was sole mistress of the manor.

Joyce remembered the old woman next door in a vague way. She had gone there to live after the death of Joyce's father, seven years previously. She had not seemed so homely then, so far as Joyce could remember. But she had not paid much attention to her until she returned home the year before; then the sight of her old neighbor had begun to fill her with aversion and horror.

"I wish we could pay her to go away," she said to John. "She'll spoil our happiness, just seeing her there. Why should there be ugly things in life, dearest?"

Joyce was not unkind, but she had always lived among beautiful things. She could not bear ugliness. Her home was superbly beautiful, though simple, and the hall was hung with the portraits of the Lamonts—all handsome, dignified and fine to look upon. Joyce had never dreamed that any human being could grow to look like the old woman next door.

She passed along the hall, looking